

4 August 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Requested WSAG Memorandum on "Factors Influencing the Decision-Making Process in Hanoi"

1. As you may recall, while the Presidential party was still in San Clemente, we heard rumbles from various informed sources (including Phil Odeen) that Dr. Kissinger had some problems with our 6 July memorandum entitled The Effect on the North Vietnamese Economy of a Reduction of Imports to 2,700 Tons Per Day. He raised these reservations in very pointed fashion at the WSAG meeting on Thursday, 20 July, insisting that we were contending -- against simple common sense -- that the entire U.S. mining/interdiction program was having no impact on North Vietnam and, in effect, were arguing that there was no level of import curtailment the North Vietnamese could not sustain. I took sharp (though polite) issue with his contention, insisting in turn that this was not our argument. We not only acknowledged that the mining/interdiction effort was having considerable impact but, indeed, described this impact in considerable detail. Our conclusions based on all evidence available, however, were that (1) the interdiction program demonstrably was not crimping -- and was not likely to crimp -- the import level below Hanoi's fairly modest minimum (not optimum) requirements and hence (2) it was unlikely that imports alone, or lack thereof, would of themselves dictate Hanoi's policy decisions. Instead, I argued (expanding on a thesis explicitly stated in the apparently offending paper), import considerations were but one of a whole range of factors influencing Hanoi's decision-making process.

2. Dr. Kissinger seemed to take this aboard, but (as anticipated) he then immediately asked that we do a study outlining this whole range of factors. I agreed that we would do the paper, but explicitly cautioned that our description of the factors influencing Hanoi's decision-making process would not be or contain a hard estimate of the specific policy decisions Hanoi would be most likely to make at given points in time. Dr. Kissinger said this was well understood. Also, he set no deadline for this paper and I carefully avoided promising it by any specific date.

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3. On returning to the Agency, I convoked the brethren and laid out Dr. Kissinger's request. After time for reflection and discussion, we came up with a written topical outline which I then took to Phil Odeen's office (on Friday, 21 July) and went over with him, point by point, trying to make certain we were doing the paper Dr. Kissinger wanted and, even more, that he would be expecting the paper that he was going to get. Phil, in turn, went over the outline with Dr. Kissinger and the next morning (Saturday, 22 July) called me to say that what we proposed to cover was fine and what Dr. Kissinger wanted. The following Monday (24 July), I convoked the brethren again, parcelled out the drafting chores and everyone set to work.

25X1 4. Attached hereto is a draft of the requested paper -- why it is termed a "draft" is explained below and is the reason for this memorandum. I wrote sections I, V, and VI. OCI -- with an assist from OER, which wrote the sentences and paragraphs dealing with logistics, resource and manpower questions -- wrote sections II and III. ONE wrote section IV. [] did his usual outstanding job of melding all the inputs into a cohesive paper, whose full text he and I have both gone over with editorial eyes.

5. At 10:00 on Thursday, 3 August, we had our weekly meeting of the brethren, after which we turned to the attached paper. My intention was to have a coordination session, hammer through it paragraph by paragraph even if that took the rest of the day, then turn the agreed text over to the OCI reproduction people who had kindly agreed to type up and print the finished product. I had expected, of course, that the coordination session would be long and probably fairly heated at times, not so much because of the paper's length but because (by design) it brings up all the gut issues over which there is a fairly broad range of honest disagreement.

25X1 6. The coordination session proved even more difficult than anticipated. In fact, after an hour and a half of very sharp discussion, we never even began the paragraph-by-paragraph review of the actual text. OER, represented by [] had no major substantive 25X1 problems, nor did [] (I believe, in fact, that 25X1 [] would have no difficulty in signing off on the attached text, though 25X1 I have not asked him to do so.) ONE [] and 25X1 [] and OCI [] however, had fundamental 25X1 substantive objections. [] 25X1 [] and I could probably have gone through a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis and come up with an agreed paper involving a fair bit of editorial modification but without wholesale changes. I doubt if [] could 25X1

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have been brought on board without major substantive revisions and know -- because he said so -- that [] could not have been.

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(Though [] clearly seconded her ONE colleagues' reservations, she remained fairly quiet, so I am not certain how much major surgery she would have felt necessary.)

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7. My objecting colleagues' major problems seemed to be twofold:

a. They felt the paper was far too optimistic in tone. As one of them from ONE put it, "This paper suggests that in the fall we might be able to see 'light at the end of the tunnel'." OCI, in fact, (and also ONE, though to a lesser extent), even had severe problems with some of OER's manpower and logistic judgments which, to me, seemed right on target.

b. They had great difficulty with -- and [] flatly said OCI could not sign on to -- any implication or suggestion that in any foreseeable time frame there might be serious divisions or splits within the Lao Dong Politburo capable of having significant policy impact. OCI felt strongly that Section VI should be thrown out altogether. (To be fair, [] point was that it was an intriguing piece of personal speculation but one with which OCI fundamentally disagreed and felt should not be included in any official statement of an Agency position.)

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8. I, of course, disagree. I would never contend that anyone's prose (especially mine) is incapable of improvement but nonetheless do contend that the attached is basically a good and useful paper.

a. I do not consider it too optimistic in tone. It very carefully avoids making any judgment that the Politburo will move in policy directions we would like to see and explicitly calls attention (in several places) to events that could well occur which Hanoi would regard as major achievements (e.g., significant Communist military gains or ARVN defeats in MR 1). It does, however, call attention to the fact that the Politburo has

a heaped platter of both current and potential problems (something I consider unarguable), that the results the Communists have achieved so far in their current offensive have not yet produced benefits commensurate with the costs and risks incurred (which I happen to believe is true), and that unless the Communists record some fairly impressive gains in some quarter over the next month or so, the Politburo will find itself faced with some very tough decisions to make.

b. I feel quite strongly that Sections I and VI are both needed and useful. At all levels of the U. S. Government, including the highest, there is a great void of ignorance concerning how our Vietnamese opponents think or even who they really are. Our language, consequently, gets very fuzzy; and fuzzy language produces fuzzy thinking. We talk in terms of disembodied abstractions (often tinged with an aura of omniscient omnipotence) -- "Hanoi," "North Vietnam," "the Vietnamese Communists" -- when in fact we are really talking about a finite group of identifiable human beings, who make mistakes and have their own problems of inter-personal relations and reciprocal personal rivalries. It is often said that "we don't know anything about the Hanoi leadership." That is simply not true. We may know far less than we would like to know, but we actually know a great deal. The real problem is that we have never packaged what we know in a form that our political masters will read, take aboard or recognize as meaningfully relevant to their concerns. Sections I and VI of the attached paper covers ground I think needs to be covered. Acknowledging my lack of total objectivity (had I not thought it useful or intellectually respectable, I would never have taken the time or trouble to write it), I would nonetheless contend that Section VI is not overly speculative. It very carefully avoids predicting that there will be a major split in the Politburo, but flags historical and current factors that, in my opinion, make this a live possibility it would be foolish to ignore.

25X1 9. When our intended coordination session broke up around noon on 3 August, without any coordination, we had agreed on the following course of action. OCI and ONE are going to submit in writing their recommendations for revision, excision and substitute text. []

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[] will then sit down with this draft and their new inputs and try to put together a package that can then be coordinated. Regarding this, however, there are two points of which you should be aware:

25X1 a. Even with [] beavering (as he always does), given the inescapably minimum time for rewriting, coordination, typing and printing, an agreed paper simply cannot be ready before Tuesday or Wednesday of next week. This is germane because while there is no set deadline, I have already received (on 3 August) two separate calls from the NSC Staff asking (allegedly at Kissinger's behest) when the paper will be finished. My answer to both calls was that we had a draft but that because the issues covered were central ones on which the evidence was ambiguous and there was a wide divergence of well-informed opinion the paper was not yet ready for transmittal. I made no firm commitments but simply said we would forward it as soon as we considered it ready for Dr. Kissinger and the WSAG's perusal.

b. Privately, at this writing I am not at all sure that we can produce a paper both useful and agreed to by all Agency components involved. In my opinion (which I think you share), watered down mush is not useful. The substantive splits between the concerned brethren, however, appear to be so basic that at this moment it looks as if any agreed paper will have to have internal Agency footnotes of dissent or (what amounts to almost the same thing) at several key points would have to say, in essence, "here some analysts believe X and others Y." I doubt if you would regard either approach as satisfactory, since both (given our audience) are both cosmetically and politically unattractive. By Monday things may look different, but I felt you needed a frank report on the current state of play.

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10. The attached draft is forwarded so you can see precisely where we now stand. You can ship it back, tear it up, read it for your own edification or do with it anything else you want to. Should you want to show it to anyone, it can accurately be described as a paper produced by your personal staff. It obviously can not be accurately described as an agreed product of all concerned Agency components.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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